

# Feel Challenge, Not Pride, from Your Heritage

If you were born in America, you were gifted with quite a heritage: explorers, craftsmen, warriors, statesmen, sailors, writers, and artists from Henry David Thoreau and Thomas Jefferson to Meriwether Lewis and Thomas Edison.

Should you take pride in that heritage? (Set aside the bad heritage - and there is plenty of it - let's talk about the good.)

A common rejoinder is that even the best of our heritage is not a reason to feel any pride. After all, we are not those men, and we did not do their great deeds.

This is true. It's a good criticism, really. But in its oft-intended effect - to make us lose interest in our heritage (or to be more critical of it) it misses the mark.

We should not feel any personal pride for the inventions of Edison, for the writing of Thoreau, the explorations of Lewis, or the philosophy of Jefferson. We should instead feel our pride challenged. These guys should make us ashamed of ourselves - at least insofar as we are not living up to their standards of character and achievement.

See, this is what our remembrance of history and heritage should do for us. It should not be self-congratulatory, but self-examining and self-motivating. It is up to us to rise up to the best of the legacy given to us, and to exceed that legacy.

If this seems like a tall order, it is. But there is another gift of heritage. With its challenge comes also the strength to meet it. The blood of great men and women flows in our veins - either literally, in genetics, or metaphorically, through ideals and tradition. The heritage they left includes the strength to be better men and women ourselves. And that, insofar as we use it, may be something to be proud of.

*Originally published at [JamesWalpole.com](http://JamesWalpole.com).*